

SOCY.01.2 Vigilante
Politics

Reflections on Terrorism

Vigilante Politics
edited by H. Jon Rosenbaum
and Peter C. Sederberg.
University of Pennsylvania Press,
292 pp., \$10.00

EXCERPT

If democracy includes placing "the monopoly of the legitimate use of force" under the control of elected representatives, as generally in Western Europe, then a clear distinction can be drawn between the legitimate democratic monopoly and *all* illegitimate competition. In America, the distinction cannot be drawn in just that way. Violence, both potential and actual, is too diffuse and too sanctioned, and tolerance for vigilantism—including police vigilantism—too widespread for the tidy "European" distinction to be tenable. Democratic process can be used to pay for illegal violence, as recent revelations about the FBI and CIA have shown.

The Church committee report on intelligence activities has raised (without fully answering) the question: "What happened to turn a law enforcement agency (the FBI) into a law violator?" The violations included incitement to violence, as the report also shows:

Although the claimed purpose of the Bureau's COINTELPRO tactics [inside the United States] was to prevent violence, some of the FBI's tactics against the [Black Panthers] were clearly intended to foster violence and many others could reasonably have been expected to cause violence.

This is the kind of tactic which is partly deprecated and partly condoned in the passages from Mr. Bell's book quoted above, and the most obvious gap in *Vigilante Politics* is its silence about such activities (that collection of